What is a collaborative workspace and what are the benefits?

The way we do business is constantly evolving, and over the past decade, there has been a notable shift towards making workplaces that are centred on the needs and desires of employees, rather than the companies who hire them. What has driven this shift? It's partly down to fashion and tastes, but we're also exposed much more to the way other people live and work, mainly because of social media. It creates pressure on employers to provide a human-centric working environment. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, the world realised that there are better ways to manage the workplace.

A research survey conducted by IWG has shown that 72% of office workers preferred long-term flexibility over where they're based to extra money. It's evident that employees were happier and more productive, and that staff churn was reduced, when a degree of flexible working was introduced to the workplace. The ultimate expression of that mindset is the collaborative workspace. It's where freedom, modernity and flexibility meets professionalism and is playing a key role in the hybrid work environment.

What is a collaborative workspace?
The collaborative workplace has a few related meanings, which do overlap. The dominant version, which we'll be dealing with here, is a space where anyone can turn up with their laptop, notepad or briefcase and get down to work in a professional environment. There are commonly accessible amenities like a reception, toilets, a kitchen, and perhaps a canteen, gym, parking spaces and vending machines, and guests can use technology such as Wi-Fi and Ethernet to access their cloud-based files, and have access to printers and scanners.

A less common definition is a space within a single company where employees from different departments can work together. That might be useful if the R&D department is working on a project alongside marketing and sales, for example, and the traditional meeting room office for rent.

How does a collaborative workspace work?
Stripped down to the basics, collaborative spaces are rooms full of furniture with access to amenities and all the right tools for connectivity. Customers usually have to book a space in advance of turning up, and pay by the hour for the desk, but there are other models, for example monthly memberships with a certain number of days included, or workspaces where customers don't have to book, but simply turn up and take a seat.

In reality, there's nothing "stripped down" about the modern collaborative office. There's a lot of competition for those customers, so coworking space are nothing like the open plan office for rent you might have seen or worked in. Many are beautifully designed, with a mix of furniture such as sofas, armchairs, pods, beanbags, desks, cubicles and so on, to make guests comfortable. They also tend to be in desirable parts of town, whether that's exclusive areas or tech hubs, surrounded by city life with its shops, restaurants and cafes for downtime. Other times they are in out-of-town business developments that are easy to reach by road.

Types of collaborative spaces
There are as many types of collaborative spaces as there are types of collaboration. They range from the functional (desks and chairs) to the types of designer havens described above. Some emphasise the face-to-face element of the serviced offices environment, where coworkers turn up with the aim of meeting people, sharing new ideas and planning to collaborate. Others have privacy as their main feature. They will have cubicles and pods rather than couches and open tables, and are usually quieter. Others satisfy the various mindsets by having distinct quiet and communal areas, so guests can blend the experience.

Benefits of a collaborative workspace

To explain the rapid growth of collaborative work environments, you just have to look at the long list of productivity benefits for freelancers, entrepreneurs, SMEs and large businesses. Here are some of the main advantages of collaborative working .

Cost efficiency
Customers are only paying for what they use, so there are no idle desks. If an employee is part-time, or if they're working for a company but have a side hustle, a collaborative workspace is perfect for setting it up without having to devote a corner of their home or open up a laptop in a noisy café.

Flexible working space
With many organisations trying to create a hybrid experience for their employees, a collaborative workspace is the perfect way to give them flexibility. You can keep your regular office space or whatever workplace you have, but also offer employees membership of collaborative office rent spaces as a further option, along with working from home. It's useful for people who live in different cities but who still need to be available for collaboration.

Networking opportunities
No business exists in a vacuum; they all need a steady stream of new clients, suppliers and partners to keep them going. This workspace design is a great way to create collaboration opportunities with people from other businesses, as well as with freelancers and startups. There are always plenty of workspaces that become ad-hoc meeting spaces when two coworkers spark up a conversation. It's one of the benefits that really can't be emulated in private offices or other traditional workplaces.

Wide range of talent
If the collaboration opportunities excite you, so should the sheer depth of talent available in the digital workspace. You'll find developers working alongside designers, architects rubbing shoulders with online retailers, and growth hackers chatting with solicitors. It's a matrix of potential connections, and these opportunities to collaborate make collaborative workspaces ideal places to create long-lasting professional bonds.

Employee socialisation and culture
Sometimes an office environment can become stale and predictable, and that can affect productivity. In a way, it's well-run businesses without great amounts of employee churn that suffer the most, as there are few opportunities to see new faces. Buying bulk membership and allowing staff to spend a couple of days

a month in one of these offices instead can benefit collaboration, productivity, enthusiasm, and that can be a boon for a healthy company culture.

Space utilisation
If you've got a permanent office that comfortably holds 15, but you've got 20 employees, you might be tempted to try and squeeze them in rather than seek larger premises. Well, why not use collaborative workspaces as a pressure valve? Give your team the option of working in the collaborative space for some of the week, and all your space issues will evaporate.

Inclusive services and amenities
We can't forget about what comes with the desk and chair. Reception staffing, security and complete cleaning and maintenance are all the responsibility of the workspace, and all the services that businesses need, such as connectivity, snacks, washing facilities, printers, scanners, meeting rooms, conference rooms and even mailboxes are all available on site.

On-hand receptionist and business concierge
Whether you're looking to find your way around the workspace or have invited clients to a meeting, the receptionist lends an air of professionalism that surpasses a lot of smaller businesses as they probably couldn't justify employing a full-time reception desk. Collaborative spaces also often have business concierge services too, which can include professional legal and financial advice, IT help, marketing or a range of other helpful services.

Easy move in, set up and transition for agile workspaces
Moving into a coworking space can be taken very literally – you turn up, grab a coffee and settle down to a day of productivity. You don't have to worry about supplying desks and fitting out a breakout area because it's all there for you.

Build a professional image in a space that reflects your company
With a collaborative workspace, you can create the professional image you wish to portray to clients. Regus can provide a professional workspace for your team and clients to enjoy.

Better employee motivation and wellbeing
Humankind is a social species and we don't tend to like being stuck in small offices with the same people every day. The collaborative space offers the perfect opportunity to create a good balance of professionalism, sociability and inspiration that will pay dividends in motivation and wellbeing.

More productivity
Research is unclear on whether working from home helps or hinders productivity, but there's no such debate when it comes to collaborative environments. When you've paid to be somewhere, and you're there for the sole purpose of working, you're much less likely to procrastinate and spend the day watching box sets or preparing snacks. Throw in the real opportunities for collaboration and you've got an inspiring, productive place to work.

No long-term commitment
With collaborative workspaces, you can come and go as the needs of your business dictate. You might have quiet months, you might work abroad in the winter, or you might just be experimenting with a new business idea. With these

spaces, the financial outlay for premises is minimal and can be stopped and started at will.

Easy expansion for your company, at home or abroad
Has your company spotted a potential opening in another city, or even another country? You can hire some local talent and set them up in a collaborative workspace and use the remote workers' knowledge of language and culture to benefit your growth strategy. If it fails, you'll have made a minimal outlay, but if it succeeds, you can use the remote team as a toe-hold for a more substantive push.

Creative work spaces for collaboration/inspiration
Collaborative work is always good when you're trying to create new ideas or products. So why not use spaces designed with collaboration in mind? Whether you're hoping to mix with external talent or are assembling a team to brainstorm a fresh idea, collaboration just comes naturally in such a vibrant, central workspace where the functional elements of running a business are all handled by someone else.

The perfect workplace for collaborative tasks
If you're looking for somewhere for your employees to collaborate and get creative, or if you're working for yourself and need a professional, prestigious location without the wasteful outlay, a collaborative workspace could be perfect for you. To find local or remote coworking spaces, take a look at Regus's selection of collaborative spaces.

We look forward to playing our part in your next successful collaboration.